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Magic and superstitions beliefs even today permeate the everyday lives of the Magyar peasants, and they have remained long after other aspects of their life have changed. They will go when urban culture and enlightenment have been adopted completely, but this is still for the future to demonstrate. It is reported that today the peasants who drive the tractors on the kolkhozes will not begin work without a little magical ritual which they learned from their fathers and which aims at assuring them a better crop.

Historically, the most important elements in Magyar folk customs are those which have their roots in primitive dramatic performances and rites inspired by magical beliefs. These customs [585] are full of dramatic symbolism as in the case of the bride who, when entering her husband's house for the first time, is seated and [844] a curly-haired baby is put in her lap. Women in difficult labor are prescribed per analogiam a walk around the trough. Some of these customs involve beating people, noise-making, feasts, competitions, fights and jumps deriving from ritual dances; e.g. in some communities the herdsmen have to pick up their yearly pay from the ground standing and jumping on one foot: this is supposed to

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789 insure that they and their animals remain brisk and alert. Another age-old ritual is the procession in celebration of the burial of winter which is still in existence today in its ancient form, although most processions now seem to have taken on ecclesiastical appearances. Another ritual performed frequently by the Magyars is the custom of walking around a person or object feared, making thus a magic circle; for example, an accused person tries to walk around the state's witnesses before his trial begins.

[372] There is an important group of folk customs which center around fire and water. Fire is a chief element in many customs aiming at the warding off of evil forces and purification. In particular, the customs connected with quarterly celebrations feature fire in some form. There are places in Hungary where the fire for the Easter Sunday "burning of Pilate" is lit with flint instead of matches or even more primitive methods such as rubbing together two sticks of wood. Ceremonial water is in many cases now holy water brought from the church.

771
755 In the peasant's spiritual life, religion and superstitions are inseparable. The following random examples illustrate well this

important facts burns are treated with the recitation of the "Our Father" (LORD'S PRAYER) when the phrase "as it is in heaven" is reached, they point with their finger toward the ground as if to show the disease in which direction to leave. Many superstitious actions have to be performed on certain religious holidays; for instance, the unmarried girls take after the midnight mass on Christmas Eve a mouthful of holy water home from the church and wash their faces with it before going to bed. It is believed that the persons who appear in their dreams to wipe the water from their faces will be their future husbands.

771 [755] 789 796 591

Most of the countless superstitions of the Magyar peasants have their international equivalents, especially those which can be traced back to Biblical sources (the ill fate connected with Friday or the number 13) and also others of the following varieties:

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Those connected with iron and its production, such as horseshoes bringing luck, and magic actions with iron tools which avert mishaps and natural disasters and which can be used against the evil influences of others (rontás 'bewitching') and for healing of animals.

Parts of the human body or anything connected with it represented, to the primitive mind, the entire human being, hence the great mass

826 789

of superstitions based on the belief that a person's hair, nails, saliva, or even his shadow, his image or his name spoken aloud could be acted upon for good or evil. In the Baranya, for instance, unrequited lovers gather the dirt bearing the footprint of their loved ones and carry it in their handkerchiefs. There is also the belief that the burning of the hair or nails will cause the destruction of the owner of these bodily parts. 789 826

Many superstitions are rooted in the primitive belief in the magic power of the spoken word. Accordingly, incantations--some of them traceably pre-literary--have developed for blessing or cursing others. Spells used for healing either invoke benevolent spirits or chase away the evil ones. 789

Certain types of witchcraft have to be performed naked or with the clothing worn inside out in order to purify the man and to ward off the influence of disturbing spirits inhabiting the clothes. Many of the charms to be performed naked foretell one's marriage partner and one's happiness in married life; others heal or combat natural disasters, such as fire, epidemics or storms. [787]

To the peasant's mind, diseases are of threefold causes demons, natural forces, or the magic transfer of diseases from others. 753 755

certain agricultural activities. For these and others, see A magyarság néprajza, Vol. IV, pp. 323 ff. 796

The New Year's Day customs are varied from region to region; "burials of the winter" and "drivings out of the winter" exist in different forms. In the region of Somló, for instance, a young man lashes an old man through the main street. 796 789

Epiphany (Vízkereszt) is considered a day favorable to exorcism. The initials G+M+B (for Gáspár, Menyhért, Boldizsár--the three Magi) are chalked on the door-lintel by a priest or by the master of the house.

Carnival merrymaking culminates at Shrovetide when special doughnuts (farsangi fánk) are served. During Lent, the Catholic population observes fast and abstinence; however, cooking with pork grease is tolerated by the Church, since this is practically the only shortening familiar to Magyar homemakers. Passion Week has also many popular customs, e.g. the burning of an image of Pilate (pilátuségetés). Good Friday is celebrated by the Protestant population with great fervor. At Easter, colorful hand-painted eggs are presented to friends, while young men of the village sprinkle the girls with perfumed or plain water. In some regions, the maypole is erected 796 [785]

241 carry on other activities, and other days when certain work must not be done.

To mention just one phase of rural activities, sowing is still done by hand in most of the villages according to an elaborate ritual. The container or the cloth in which the grain is held must be of a certain kind, and the peasant's clothing, and diet on the day of sowing must be also of

[789] a certain kind. Incantations are said upon the seed and the act of sowing itself is highly elaborated.

The Magyar farmer loves his land and works on it with paternal care and great industriousness. The methods he is using may be partly outdated but they are based on age-old experience and loving care of the soil. He is well-known for spending more on veterinarian than on doctor bills and is more apt to try "popular" methods of medicine on the members of his family than on his domestic animals. He respects nature, believes that his labor is of no avail if supernatural forces do not favor him with good weather, and uses both prayers and superstitious practices to assure their benevolence.

SOURCES

000 Bartha, Károly, et al.

[1933-37]. A magyarság néprajza. [The Ethnography and Folklore of the Hungarians.] 4 Vols. Ed. Elemér Csakó. Budapest: Királyi Magyar Egyetemi Nyomda. 3000 illus.

Birth and christening

As yet the child is nowhere at all; that is, it exists only in another world, — it is only «on its way», the stork has not even put it down, but what a number of anxieties it already causes! Will it be a boy or a girl? . . . Usually the man wishes for a son, the wife for a daughter. But mere wishing is no good; something has to be done about it. If the visitor is fond of the young farmer and wants to please him, he must put his hat on the bed, so that the newborn shall be a boy . . . But after all, whether it be fated to be a boy or a girl, the main thing is that it shall be «something». If a new wife pays a visit, they offer her bread, but not without saying: — «. . . I give you a part of its tail, so that you have a child; I peel it so that it shall be red, I cut it up so that it shall have curly hair . . .» It is a good sign if a glass of water is upset on the table and its contents flow towards the young woman: that means a baptism in the near future . . . Well, let us say that it is certain that «something» will happen, still the great question remains open: will it be a boy or a girl, trousers or skirts, a fillet or spurs; and what will «it» shout when «it» comes into this world, will its first screams be «o-iii o-iii» or «o-aaa o-aaa»? But there are good presages for all this if the young woman finds a pin, if she likes pipe smoke, or if she wishes to eat bacon, then it will be a boy; if she finds a needle, or if she longs for sugar and strawberries, then it will be a girl.

One cannot predict things, but there are enough reliable signs. Even so one has to be careful of every step . . . The young woman must not hide a leaf in her bosom, because a similar mark will show on the child's breast; fruit should not fall on her and, if it does, she must not make a sudden

796 Sunday. On Shrove Tuesday Prince Cibere wins; at Easter King Marrow-bone, or, as he is called in other parts of the country, King Bone would be the victor, but the people settle the fray as early as Palm Sunday. A Hungarian poem of the 18th century already refers to the battle of Shrove Tuesday; then Prince Cibere took over the government, while Duke Marrow-bone lay prostrate on the ground for fourty days.

• [789] Prince Cibere is a doll, made of rags and straw. They carry «him» through the village singing happily and at the end of the village he is either burnt, or drowned, or thrown over the village boundary. Shameful is his death and enormous the joy caused by his passing:

Villő! Villő! At the end of the village is a silken tent,
Let us sing there as merrily as at other times,
Villő! Villő! Let's carry out the *Kicevice*
And bring back the bone and marrow, villő! villő!

[262] The *Kicevice* means exactly the same thing as the cibere, at least as far as its merits go. Its other name is «*Kisze*», which is a fruit soup or a kind of paste made of oatmeal and leaven, and it is eaten during Lent with milk, honey and water or plum sauce. It is a very poor Lent food, — small wonder that it is carried out of the village with such joy... This joy is thus worded and expressed in other parts of the country:

Out with you *Kisze*, out with you,
Out you go, *Kisze*, out! out! out!
Come in ham, come in quick,
Come in ham and dumplings big!

[789] Popular belief has it that with the banishment of Prince Cibere, that is the «kisze», all illness and trouble, measles and such like are expelled from the village. The procedure is also supposed to help against hail.

10: Viski E-4, 5 (no date) 1932 EC1 Hungary EC1

Whitsuntide customs

527 177 The Hungarians came into their present lands more than a thousand years ago, and it was naturally here that they adopted Christianity and learnt all the terms of the Christian faith; often indeed they merely clothed with a new meaning the old expressions of their former pagan creed. The Hungarian name of Whitsun: «pünkösd», like its German synonym «Pfingsten», is derived either from the Latin «Dies Pentacostis», or the original Greek «Pentakosté» of the New Testament. The Hungarians did not call this feast after the rose as did their Slav neighbours, but its popular name is «Red Whitsun», and one of the favourite flowers in Hungarian gardens is the «Whitsun rose», that is the peony. As early as the 18th century a charming Hungarian folk song mentions Whitsun in connection with the rose:

You wern't born from a mother,
You have grown on a rosebush;
On Red Whitsun's day
You were born from a rose!

This fragment of a popular song undoubtedly formed part of the habitual Whitsun songs or the game known as «Whitsun's queen».

527 789 883 857 The fact that the Hungarian name of Whitsun is merely a thousand years old does not imply that the Hungarian game of having a Whitsun queen originates from a similar date. It is much older than human memory and is merely an adaptation of the feast of fertility and fertilization, celebrated at the time of nature's blossoming. It is a pagan tradition, which lives all over Europe in the Christian world, surreptitiously and almost entirely devoid

527 of its real meaning. But everywhere it has its local colour,
•789 its local bearing or its local peculiarities. According to
the simplest form of this custom, the older girls rig out
883 a little one in a white dress and carry her all over the
857 village. The child has a wreath on her head and her face
is covered by a veil. Thus they carry the mysterious little
queen from house to house, from yard to yard and, dancing
around her, they sing their charming song:

God has brought us
Red Whitsun's day,
We will carry around
Our little queen,
And the rose wreath of
Our little queen.
To young men we give
A bunch of sweet carnations,
To old men we give
A bottle of sweet wine,
To old women we give
A delicious dove pie.
I wasn't born from a mother
I have grown on a rosebush,
On Red Whitsun's day
I was born in the dawn, etc.

At the end of the song they lift the little queen by her arms with the cry: «let's lift the queen !» — She is usually a small girl of five or six and lifting her veil they say to the lady of the house: «May your hemp grow as high as this !» It is well known that amongst other things hemp is also the symbol of fertility. As the lifting of the Whitsun queen symbolizes a magic charm to ensure a good hemp harvest, so sitting her on the ground is supposed to prevent the hemp from growing. This is what the procession does if the hostess will not give the queen a warm reception, or will not allow her to enter the court-yard, or if having let her enter it, she puts nothing into the basket of the ladies-

189 in-waiting. The magic extends in some places to other
527 plants as well, in the following order:
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The queen's wand
Shall bring to this house
Wine, wheat and fruit.

Hemp is the symbol of fertility, and now-a-days the Whitsun feasters apply their magic primarily to an ample hemp harvest; but they also wish for abundant «wine, wheat and fruit», the main products of this little agricultural country. There is a close connection between the admittance of young men to manhood and this fertilizing magic; and we do find in the latter faint traces of an ancient initiation ceremony. Thus it is a rule that the queen's face must remain composed even if people lift her veil, laugh at her or tickle her. Very similar is the duty imposed on the «sad king», who has a part in the custom of setting up a May-tree: he is not allowed to laugh either. This same custom is prevalent in the initiation ceremonies of primitive people: the person who is being initiated is not allowed to show fright, nor must he laugh whatever the joke may be.

527 Very long ago the King of Whitsun probably appeared
883 with the little queen. Traces of this are found in one of
857 the Whitsun games on the Great Plain, where one of the bridesmaids has a kerchief around her head, as though she were a married woman, and another girl acts the part of the bridegroom. The song of these Whitsun celebrators refers also to a Hungarian royal wedding of the Árpád family, which occurred in 1211, the bride being no less a person than Saint Elisabeth of Hungary, who married a prince of Thuringia. She was the daughter of King Andrew II. of Hungary. We may well wonder why the children's custom preserved the memory of this great event. This is the song:

1 [See cat 116, p. 62--Analyst]

The day of Saint Ivan is a mating feast, its ritual and aim are fully explained by the symbolic verses of the above songs. But many other customs are also connected with this day and the more famous were thus summed up by a learned Transylvanian Calvinist priest, Peter Bod (1712—1767): — «These were the things they used to do on that day: 1. The children collected all kinds of rubbish and bones in order to burn them and make a great smoke, the reason being that the pagans used to make fires about that time around the wells, so that snakes should not multiply in their neighbourhood, as usually happens about the day of Saint John. The Christians, in their ignorance, made fires about that same time and leapt over them, wishing that all their sadness might get burnt. — 2. They carried hot embers along the boundaries of their land, hoping that the harvest of the fields would thus be blessed. — 3. In some places they rolled wheels on that day, meaning that the sun had already reached the top of the horizon, and that everything was on the eve of change.»

We have already said what an effective drug the «ruta», mentioned in the song, proved against snakes, and we added that in an old Hungarian chronicle it was classed with frankincense. All the customs grouped on this day have also a purifying tendency.

According to a record of the second half of the last century, «they seek to drive away dragons and devils with the fragrant herbs thrown into the fire, so that harmful tempests shall not destroy the young crops, and the wells and springs shall not get poisoned. In some places, to this end they make evil smelling smoke by burning bones, dust and all kinds of rags, as though they wanted to drive away devils. Others make a fire on the edge of the crops and walk around them with hot embers. Others again lay a big fire at the end of a forest or at the foot of a hill, and sing

[The Hungarian peasants celebrating St Ivan's Day -- Analyst]

527 and dance around it. Then they carry hot embers to the
789 houses, and put them in the gardens, so that caterpillars shall not destroy the fruit, or else they put them in the middle of the seeds so that the crops shall not be blasted, etc. From the way girls jump over Saint Ivan's fire their married future can be foretold.»

527 To this day all these small and fragmentary customs and superstitions are practiced to a great extent, but their full enumeration would be lengthy and uninteresting, like Saint Ivan's song. We do not want to take up the reader's time with that. It is enough to know that these little customs on the whole are either meant to purify, or else they are the fragments of the once extensive, but since continually declining mating feast. But we must draw attention to one more thing: the ancient rolling of the wheel. The wheel — according to the learned record of olden times, — represents the Sun when it «reaches the highest point of the horizon». Another custom, preserved in a few places, whereby the wheel is bound round with straw and, when lit, is rolled down a hill, is even more explicit in its symbolic meaning. If we remember that the oldest wheels had no spokes, but that the next slightly improved ones already had four spokes, we can notice the connection between the burning sun wheel and the square fire of Saint Ivan around which the spectators sat in four groups, separated for four different reasons.

It is certain that what ever belief or superstition (the two are alike in their essense) determined the development of different purifying customs, the summer solstice, that is Saint Ivan's day, the feast of flowery Saint John, was first and foremost the feast of mating and of love. In the song itself these two things alone are of importance. Faith and tradition were only concerned with this aspect of the day, they tried to preserve it and perpetuate its memory

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245 527 which follows it. This is an artificial flower bouquet, a pale copy of the old, familiar custom, but it tries with much good will to create at least the illusion of the real thing for the joy of people who live in the great town. On seeing it people from the country-side at least dwell on the memories of their childhood.

The richest, brightest and gayest «szüret» customs prevailed in the districts in which the wine harvest was the best and richest. The first of these is the district of Tokaj and in it the little town of Mád, which is a famous place for grape ceremonies. The entertainments of its gentry are worthy of a novelist's pen. The dances of its coopers and agricultural labourers preserved a whole list of ancient Hungarian customs. Speaking of Carnival, let us mention a few.

415 789 If wine is the favourite national drink of the Hungarians, it is necessary for it to appear in proper attire. The things with which wine is clothed, are : a stone bottle, a flask or a noggin. The noggin can be a decoration on a table, a nice partner on a journey, a dear lover always kissed with joy ! The person who knocks it out of our hands shall be cursed ! Terrifying, fearful words are usually written on the flask, to cut short all kinds of evil thoughts. For instance :

To the person desiring to steal this flask,
I wish that he shall become so grand,
That he shall push wheel-barrows in Buda or Pest,
And become the captain of the beggars !

But if we approach the beloved flask without evil thoughts, it speaks to us as Hungarian men usually address their guests :

This bottle, made of clay, belongs to Simon Kiss,
From this he offers a drink to many of his friends.
Take a nice, long draught from it,
A bad road does not matter to a good horse !

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789 Sometimes the friendly appeal and the threat of consequences in case of unrightous behaviour follow each other in the lines of a verse :

If you have a drink from it,
May it become you well ;
If you steal my flask,
May you break your neck.

Some of the flasks are made in the shape of a cross or prayer book. A squat, earthenware «book» explains its origin in the following line :

This is the daily devotion of Joseph Papdi.

This kind of pagan epigram sounds very much like blasphemy. But if we ask the profane Hungarian carefully whether he is not ashamed of the horrible words with which in his bitterness he curses heaven and earth, he reassures us with absolute conviction :

— «It does not go to the same place as our prayers !»

Superstitions of Saint Lucia's day

796 December the 13th, Saint Lucia's day, is the day popularly dedicated to a whole collection of superstitions. It is 12 days before Christmas, and thus precedes the feast by the same number of days as Christmas in the Gregorian Calendar precedes the Christmas of the ancient calendar. The popular name of this space of time is Saint Lucia's calendar, and the majority of the customs and superstitions of the winter solstice have crowded together on this one day, as the witches do on Sylvester's night on Saint Gregory's hill in Buda...

754 Speaking of witches, we should like to add that it is
789 just on this unfortunate 13th, Saint Lucia's day, that we can, if we wish, see witches face to face... If anyone

wants to see them in Hungary, let him follow the local custom... To this end we must carve a small milking stool, just big enough for one person to stand on. The carving must be begun on Saint Lucia's day, and every day we must do a little more. It must be finished on Christmas day. The stool must be made of nine kinds of wood, or better still, of thirteen odd bits of wood... It must have four legs, a top and two wedges to secure each leg, making thirteen pieces in all; the same number as the date of Saint Lucia's day; — the thirteenth day reckoned from the one which dawns after the last day in Saint Lucia's calendar... — If we are working on it in the evenings, and an unknown voice says: — «You work thus if you want to master it!» — we must not answer but merely go on calmly with our task. It is a long job, but well worth it... Even a Hungarian proverb has it that: «It is made as slowly as Saint Lucia's stool.» When the stool is ready, it is advisable to put on our waistcoat inside out, and make a knot in our tie or scarf. If, having thus put everything in order, we go to the midnight mass at Christmas, draw a circle round ourselves with chalk, and stand on top of the stool at the consecration of the Host... lo! we can see all the witches one by one! They leap around the priest all naked; they curse and spit; some of them have horns, others moustaches, a few wear a milking pail on their heads... They all turn their heads away from the Sacrament with horror... But as soon as we have seen and recognized them, we must run! We must pull the stool to bits, and rush home at full speed! It is wise to throw poppy and caraway seeds behind us for the witches following us to pick up. For these they even give up the chase! Having reached home we had better throw the stool straight into the fire, so that it may burn without leaving a trace!

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754 It is a good thing to know the witches, so that we
789 shall also know which bad soul of the village takes away the milk of the cow and causes other sterility ... Because, with chickens for instance, there is also much trouble at this time of year: it is already Christmas, and they do not even think of beginning to lay eggs. But there are remedies even for that. It is wise to know them, especially those of Saint Lucia's day. These rules, which count as remedies, are the following: — we must not sew on Saint Lucia's day, — we must not spend money, — in the evening we must frighten the fowls with a piece of wood, — the mistress of the house must drive the hens off their roost in the hen-coop with a broom held in her left hand; we must shake the scovel over the hen-coop; — on this day we must sleep on maize and throw this same maize to the hens; — we must steal a little wheat from the mill for the hens, — we must feed the hens from a sieve. One or two of these precautions must prove effective, especially if, while doing it, we murmur some traditional spell, for instance: — «Our hen shall lay eggs, that of our two neighbours shall only cackle; my hen shall lay and lay, the neighbour's hen shall cackle and cackle; — hens, hens, you shall lay and cackle, lay and cackle; I also shall cackle, you also shall cackle, hens, hens, lay eggs! — M[illegible]en, you shall lay eggs, the hens of the others shall only cackle!»

These are the most effective things we can do on Saint Lucia's day, but if for some reason we do not have complete faith in them, then we must welcome the «kotyolók». (cacklers) These are the later descendants of our ancient sorcerers who conjure up fertility.

They bring under their arms straw or a log of wood, put it down onto the doorstep, or more often in the room just behind the door, and then they start their magic cant:

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Lucia, Lucia, cackle, cackle,
Their hens and their geese shall lay eggs,
Their cows shall give plenty of milk,
Lucia, Lucia, cackle, cackle...

They shall have as many eggs
As there are stars in the sky,
They shall have as many chickens
As there are stones in the gravel,
Lucia, Lucia, cackle, cackle...

They wish for other earthly blessings as well, especially for fertility:

Their axe, their driller shall stand in its helve
Like a young tree, straight and erect,
Lucia, Lucia, cackle, cackle...

While the children, even grown lads, sing with the «kotyolók», the mistress of the house sprinkles their heads with water, dropping it through a sieve, or throws maize on their heads. The «kotyolók» leave the straw or the log behind, but they steal some more in the courtyard for the magic which is to be performed in the neighbourhood. The mistress of the house puts the straw under the hens, and gives them the maize. The kotyolók go about at dawn, because should a woman visitor call before them, their efforts would be vain...

It is unwise to drive away these sorcerers, because they then use their power the other way round. And these spells in the opposite sense are just as forceful as the real one:

Lucia, Lucia, cackle, cackle,
They shall only have one chicken
And even that one shall be blind!

But if they are received in a friendly way, and are even placated with the traditional dry pears, then we may be certain that: — «Our hen shall lay eggs and also cackle, but yours shall only cackle...»